

Colossians

Slaves and Masters

Colossians 3:22-4:1

November 20, 2022

HDBC

When Christ is in your life as Lord, it impacts every part of your life. It impacts how **husbands and wives** interact with each other, as well as how **parents and children** relate. But it does not end in the home. It extends to every relationship that we might have. This becomes clear as Paul moves from describing relationships among family members to relationships between servants and masters.

Let's look at the text. Colossians 3:22-4:1

Paul was writing at a time when slavery was an accepted part of the Roman empire. Of course, it was not restricted to the Romans. It was practice around the world at that time. In fact, a review of the history of slavery will reveal that slavery in one some form has been a part of many cultures in almost every era of human history. Historians estimate that there were 60 million slaves in the Roman empire, or about half the population. Almost every kind of real work was done by slaves, even that of being a doctor or a teacher.

So, Paul is addressing a reality of life in his day and describing how slaves and masters were to live under the mutual Lordship of Christ. How does a Christian act in either of those roles.

This raises some questions about what the Bible teaches about slavery and how we are to understand it today. So, before we get into the text and the application of it, I want to make some general statements about how the Bible treats slavery and specifically how Paul addresses it in this passage.

1) In American history some slaveholders used the Bible to justify slavery

This was a gross misuse of God's word. Lifted out a few verses to justify their claims and pointed to a lack of direct denunciation of slavery as an endorsement. Remember that the Bible does not specifically condemn every evil institution or practice in this broken world.

The primary purpose of the Bible message is to show us that we are sinners, that God is a holy but loving God who has provided a way for our forgiveness. That His son, Jesus, is that way. It is primarily the story of how we can be made right with God. It acknowledges the pain and suffering in our world and points us to a better world . . . Heaven.

2) The SBC was formed out of an unwillingness to abolish slavery

The FMB decided to stop sending as missionaries, those who were slave owners. Rather than denouncing and abolishing slavery, southern Baptist churches broke away and formed their own convention and sending agency. This is a very dark part of our history. We have denounced this emphatically.

3) The slavery described in the Bible was different from American slavery

American slavery was race-based slavery. The slavery described in the Bible generally was not. In Bible times people sometimes entered into slavery voluntarily to have their needs met. Some went into slavery temporarily because they had debts they could not pay. To use one to justify the other is a misuse of Scripture and a failure to understand history.

4) The Bible does not endorse slavery

It recognizes slavery as a reality in a broken world and provides regulations for good treatment by masters and servants. It also points out that masters and slaves are equal under Christ.

5) Paul likely had domestic servants in mind in this passage.

There would be a logical connection between his discussion of family life and that of household servants. To ignore that would have been to ignore a common fixture in the first-century household.

6) Slaves are instructed to become free if they are able

1 Cor. 7:21. *If you are able also to become free, rather do that.*

7) Slave trading is condemned

Paul condemns slave-traders | 1 Tim. 1:10. *He* offers a list of offenses that are considered lawless and rebellious. Included in the list are **kidnappers**. The word is sometimes translated **slave traders**. Refers to those who acquire other persons to sell them into slavery. This not only refers to classic slavery but to what we know of today as **human trafficking**.

Thankfully, most societies have banned slavery. So, do we ignore this passage? Or can we find principles behind these instructions that we can apply in a particular area of our lives? I believe we can. The closest thing that we have to this specific context would be the employee-employer relationship. So, I believe that is how the Lord would have us apply these principles.

Your relationship to Christ is undeniably tied to your relationships at work. If being a Christian does not make you a better employee or employer, then something is wrong. Being a Christian ought to make you a harder worker and a better boss. This does not mean you have to be the more successful, or the best in your field. But you ought to be the one who puts out the most effort.

1. Employees (3:22-25)

Paul begins by addressing those who are in positions under authority. So, these first instructions are directed to employees. It should be noted that the underlying principle for all that is to follow is found in verse 17. In everything that we do, we must realize that God is our ultimate judge and is watching. We are to work with the constant awareness that we are in the presence of an awesome and holy God who demands nothing less than our best. Now, let's look at some specifics

1) Do Your Job (22a)

The text tells slaves to obey their masters. The application to our situation would be for us to simply do our jobs. That sounds so obvious that it should not have to be said, but it does.

Whatever it is that you have agreed to do in this job, see that it gets done. When your supervisor gives you an assignment don't try to pass it on to someone else or to find ways to avoid it. Just do it.

Think you have it tough at work. Memo found in the ruins of a London office building dated 1852.

1. This firm has reduced the hours of work, and the clerical staff will now only have to be present between the hours of 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. weekdays.

2. Clothing must be of a sober nature. The clerical staff will not disport themselves in raiment of bright colors, nor will they wear hose unless in

good repair.

3. A stove is provided for the benefit of the clerical staff. Coal and wood must be kept in the locker. It is recommended that each member of the clerical staff bring four pounds of coal each day during the cold weather.
4. No member of the clerical staff may leave the room without permission from the supervisor.
5. No talking is allowed during business hours.
6. The craving for tobacco, wine, or spirits is a human weakness, and as such is forbidden to all members of the clerical staff.
7. Now that the hours of business have been drastically reduced, the partaking of food is allowed between 11:30 and noon, but work will not on any account cease.
8. Members of the clerical staff will provide their own pens. A new sharpener is available on application to the supervisor.
9. The owners recognize the generosity of the new labor laws but will expect a great rise in output of work to compensate for these near Utopian conditions.

That's a tough place to work!

2) Be Sincere (22b)

For the believer, the inner thought is just as important as the outer action. Paul is writing of an honesty. We should not be hypocritical about our work. Isn't it amazing how sometimes our actions are different if we know the boss is watching.

A retired man became interested in the construction of an addition to a shopping mall. Observing the activity regularly, he was especially impressed by the conscientious operator of a large piece of equipment. The day finally came when the observer had a chance to tell this man how much he'd enjoyed watching his careful work. Looking astonished,

the operator replied, "You're not the supervisor?"

As a Christian you should not see how little you can do and just get by, you should strive for excellence in everything that you do. Guard your attitude. Your spirit.

3) Remember Your True Boss (22c-25)

As you are working, remember who your real boss is. Jesus Christ is the Lord of your life. All that we do is for His glory and honor. In other words, we are work as if Jesus were our direct supervisor. If He were your boss on the job, would it make a difference in how you do your work? If so, then you need to change how you do your work. You must realize that we can serve and honor God in the day-to-day tasks of our jobs.

Martin Luther understood this when he wrote, the maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays – not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship.

2. Employers (4:1)

What about those who are employers? If you are in authority over one or a hundred the principles are the same. Two important principles to remember.

1) Justice

The word speaks of doing what is right in the eyes of God. Employers too are to realize that God is watching them. It means treating your workers with respect and dignity. Paying them a fair wage and giving them whatever benefits are fair and just for the work that they are doing. Refusal to take advantage of another person.

Long John Silvers. Initial Crew. Two buddies were made assistant managers. Offered a base salary rather than hourly. One took it. Big mistake. They worked him to death.

2) Fairness

This word speaks of equity or equality. Justice means you should pay them what their work is worth. Fairness means you should treat each

worker the same. The standard should be the same for all workers. Every individual who works for you should be treated with the same respect and reasonableness. Treat them like you would want to be treated.

There are some really distorted views of what fairness means. Some people think “fair” means we all have the same things. If you have a lot, and I have a little, you must give up part of what you have so that we can be equal. That’s not fairness, that’s socialism.

A socialist once came to see Andrew Carnegie and soon was railing against the injustice of Carnegie having so much money. In his view, wealth was meant to be divided equally. Carnegie asked his secretary for an assessment of everything he owned and at the same time looked up the figures on world population. He did a little arithmetic on a pad and then said to his secretary. "Give this gentleman 16 cents. That's his share of my wealth."

Driving a school bus, keeping financial books, digging holes for a utility company, painting a wall, fixing a tire, sweeping a floor, stocking groceries can all give glory to God if done in the right way and in the right spirit. Regardless of your job or your position in your job, you can glorify God there, in the mundane, day-to-day chores. If you are the boss be the most Christ-like boss, you can be. If you are the worker, be the most Christ-like worker you can be.

I'm wondering if there is anyone here who knows who Franz Mohr is? He once made this statement. *I play [the piano] more in Carnegie Hall than anybody else, but I have no audience.* Mohr was the Chief Technician for the piano makers, Steinway & Sons. A *New York Times* obituary from Sunday April 17, 2022, described how Mohr worked:

Sometimes a string would snap, or a pedal would need adjusting during a concert, and he would step into the spotlight for a moment. But he did much of his work alone, on that famous stage and others around the world. He might have been mistaken for a pianist trying out a nine-foot grand for a recital — until he reached for his tools and began making minute adjustments, giving a tuning pin a tiny twist or a hammer a slight shave.

For years he went where the pianists went. He played before presidents and foreign dignitaries. He also attended to the world's most famous performers' personal pianos.

But he never begrudged taking a backseat to the stars. His boss, Henry Steinway, once said, "To understand Franz, one must understand ... that his Christian faith is at the core of his being and affects everything he says and does." Mohr claims that he loved being a "faithful plodder" who strove, in the words of Jesus, to be "faithful in little things."